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BRITISH COLUMBIA WelcomeBC

NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Attorney General
and Minister responsible for Multiculturalism
Ministry of Education

PROVINCE FOSTERS A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR IMMIGRANT YOUTH

RICHMOND – A partnership between the ministries of Attorney General and Education to provide orientation information and support to newly arrived families and connect them to services and resources in the school and community was officially launched today by Attorney General Wally Oppal and Education Minister Shirley Bond at Brighouse Elementary School in Richmond.

"It is exciting to see school districts taking a lead role in the delivery of these important services for immigrants," said Oppal. "By welcoming immigrants and building culturally diverse communities, we are making multiculturalism work in British Columbia."

The Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) initiative will operate in 10 school districts in the Lower Mainland, Abbotsford and Greater Victoria this fall. SWIS workers in secondary and elementary schools will help immigrant and refugee children adjust to school culture and focus on learning, while providing their parents and caregivers with an understanding of Canadian culture and the school system, increasing opportunities for their involvement in the school and community.

"We're focused on ensuring all B.C. students have every opportunity to achieve success in the classroom," said Education Minister Shirley Bond. "This program provides that extra measure of support for immigrant students and their families."

"Boards of education welcome the Settlement Workers in School initiative," said Penny Tees, president of BC School Trustees Association. "The program will provide much needed services that will support student success in school, and strengthen community and school connections."

The program is aimed at helping youth and their families in both elementary and secondary schools who are permanent residents. This includes refugees and protected persons who are in their first year of settlement in Canada. $11 million in new federal funding has been committed over two years to deliver this service, beginning in the 2007/08 school year.

The SWIS program is part of the WelcomeBC initiative to help immigrants moving to British Columbia access existing and expanded services so they are better able to adapt to life in their new communities. Under the Agreement for Canada-British Columbia Cooperation on Immigration last fall, the Province negotiated an additional $71.5 million in federal funding, over two years, for services for the province's growing immigrant population and $1.573 million for anti-racism and multiculturalism services. Other programs are being developed in consultation with immigrant settlement service providers, using available funding.

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1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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